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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAKU 000356

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DEPT FOR EUR/CARC AND EUR/PGI, ALSO OES
DEPT PLEASE PASS USAID
ANKARA FOR AGRICULTURAL COUNSELOR
GENEVA FOR HEALTH ATTACHE
ROME FOR FAO REPRESENTATIVE

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TAGS: [EAGR](#) [EAID](#) [PGOV](#) [KFLU](#) [CASC](#) [AJ](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR AND EU TROIKA RAISE CONCERNS WITH PM ON
AVIAN INFLUENZA; SUSPICIOUS HUMAN ILLNESS BEING INVESTIGATED

REF: A. A) BAKU 329 AND PREVIOUS

[1](#)B. B) 05 BAKU 1892

Classified By: DCM JASON P. HYLAND; REASONS 1.4 (B,D)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMAMRY: In a March 6 meeting requested by the Ambassador and EU Troika (EU Commission, German Ambassador, French Charge) to highlight common concerns about Azerbaijan's handling of avian influenza problems, Prime Minister Artur Rasi-zade, welcomed international expertise in dealing with the AI threat, contradicting what his First Deputy Prime Minister told us just days before. He also agreed in principle that a compensation plan for farmers was necessary. Following press reports of six suspicious human illnesses and the deaths of two young people from Azerbaijan's rural Salyan region, Rasi-zade claimed that the Health Ministry ruled out avian influenza in all eight cases. Separately, Post learned that the Azerbaijan State Veterinary Service (SVS) on February 28 contacted the Weybridge, UK reference laboratory for the first time and planned to send 17 samples from wild birds and poultry for verification. In addition, Post's avian influenza working group met March 6 to review the situation, Post's tripwires (ref B), and identify additional action required. Post has increased our efforts to ensure appropriate human samples are sent for international testing. We are also preparing a coQngency wardenQessage in the event of confirmed human infection. END SUMMARY.

PRIME MINISTER SUPPORTIVE

[1](#)2. (C) On March 6, the Ambassador and EU Troika called on PM Rasi-zade to express strong common concern over the GOAJ's avian influenza efforts. The German Ambassador stressed that AI was a global problem. However, national governments, like Azerbaijan, had the first responsibility to deal with the problem. With international media interest in Azerbaijan increasing, transparency and action from the GOAJ was now critical. Failure to act would cause a negative image for Azerbaijan. The French Charge noted that the struggle against AI was a matter of trust; the international community needed the GOAJ to be actively engaged. The Ambassador stressed that the international community looked to cooperate with Azerbaijan. However, in light of the threat to humans, the GOAJ needed to address four areas immediately: active

surveillance of poultry throughout the country, effective quarantine and biosafety mechanisms, a broad public information campaign, and a compensation scheme to induce the public to report suspicious bird deaths. All of these areas would be helped, he said, by the rigorous implementation of the GOAJ action plan, drawing on international expertise.

13. (C) Rasi-zade, in contrast to his deputy (DPM Abbas Abbasov) welcomed international expert assistance, in addition to equipment and supplies from donors. (NOTE: In a March 1 meeting with donors, DPM Abbasov took a much harsher line, see ref A). He expressed concern that unscrupulous businessmen would take advantage of any GOAJ compensation plan. He opined that Azerbaijan first needed to get rid of avian flu and then work on a compensation plan. He recapped GOAJ avian influenza efforts to date and claimed that the GOAJ cooperated closely with the World Bank and Asian Development Bank. On unconfirmed reports of suspicious human cases, Rasi-zade claimed that the Ministry of Health had stated there was no connection to avian influenza. He noted that a total of eight suspect cases were reported, all originating in the rural Salyan district of Azerbaijan. Six of the cases were now in Baku in "good condition," he said. Two others, he said, had died over the weekend. (NOTE: Post's medical staff visited two Baku hospitals on March 6 and met directly with medical staff. Including the two fatalities, there are currently between 8-11 suspicious respiratory illness cases. At this time, it is not clear what these illnesses are. Post's medical staff is following up with health authorities for a full readout on all cases. Post will report this information septel. END NOTE.)

NEW SAMPLES SET FOR TESTING ABROAD

BAKU 00000356 002 OF 002

14. (SBU) Post learned from the Weybridge, UK reference laboratory March 6 that the State Veterinary Service contacted the lab February 28. Azerbaijan's Chief Veterinarian asked for the lab's assistance in testing an additional 17 samples from wild birds and poultry taken from throughout Azerbaijan. As of March 3, however, the Cabinet of Ministers indicated that no additional samples had left the country following the February 6 set, which was sent following strong Embassy intervention. Post continues to urge the vet authorities to send samples to international reference labs immediately.

POST'S AVIAN FLU GROUP MEETS

15. (SBU) On March 6, Post's avian influenza working group met to discuss the situation in Azerbaijan and examine Post's tripwires (ref B). The group determined that at the present time there had been no finding of human cases of avian influenza in Azerbaijan. As a result, the tripwire concerning human cases had not been reached. However, the group acknowledged that the situation remained fluid and could change rapidly. Post's consular section will be ready to send an approved warden message very quickly in the event of a positive human case finding. In addition, embosfs have redoubled efforts aimed at sending samples (animal and human) out for international testing.

HARNISH